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I. SECRETARY-GENERAL COMMENDS AMMAN MEETING OF ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN NEGOTIATORS

The following statement was circulated on 11 January 2012 by the Spokesperson for United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (SG/SM/14044):

The Secretary-General commends the Palestinian and Israeli negotiators for meeting in Jordan today and expresses his appreciation to His Majesty the King of Jordan, as well as Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, for facilitating this meeting in the framework of the 23 September Quartet statement. Special Coordinator Robert Serry joined other Quartet envoys and the Quartet representative in Amman for this occasion.

The Secretary-General encourages the parties to build on this meeting and to continue working to establish forward momentum towards a lasting peace.

II. SECRETARY-GENERAL CIRCULATES LETTER BY THE CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE INFORMING THAT SAUDI ARABIA JOINED THE COMMITTEE AS OBSERVER

Circulated on 11 January 2012, the letter from the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Abdou Salam Diallo addressed to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, informs that Saudi Arabia will be joining the Committee as an observer (A/66/654). The text is reproduced below.

I have the honour to inform you that I received a letter, dated 9 December 2011, addressed to the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People from the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations, Mr. Abdallah Yahya Al-Mouallimi, informing me of the wish of his country to take part, as an observer, in the work of the Committee (see annex).

The Committee at its 338th meeting, held on 15 December 2011, approved the request of Saudi Arabia and welcomed that country to take part, as an observer, in the work of the Committee.

In the light of the above, I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 37.

III. UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT SIGNS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH PALESTINIAN CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS TO BOLSTER ECONOMIC MODELLING AND FORECASTING

The following press release was issued on 18 January 2012 by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development:

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) signed, on 21 December 2011, a memorandum of understanding aimed at strengthening the Bureau's capacities for economic odeling and forecasting.

The goal of this cooperation between the two institutions is to enhance the capacities of the Palestinian Authority in producing, evaluating and interpreting demographic, economic and labour data to guide in the formulation and carrying out of socio-economic policies.

The memorandum builds on 27 years of cooperation between UNCTAD and the Palestinian Authority through the Assistance to the Palestinian People Unit of UNCTAD. Numerous efforts have provided support to the Palestinian people, government, agencies and private-sector institutions. This support is delivered through the provision of technical expertise and advisory services.

The latest agreement reinforces UNCTAD support to the PCBS – the main Palestinian institution entrusted with publishing all official Palestinian statistical figures. The larger aim of PCBS is to build a modern, comprehensive and sound statistical system that can fully support Palestinian development ambitions.

This cooperation aims to support the efforts of PCBS to build the capacities of its newly established Economic Forecast Department, by allowing it to house and use the UNCTAD macroeconometric model of the Palestinian economy, the Integrated Simulation Framework, at its headquarters in Ramallah. The PCBS will conduct updates, further develop the model and use it for official economic forecasts. UNCTAD will provide PCBS with relevant tools and reports related to the model, and will provide advisory services and technical consultation as needed.

This cooperation has already borne fruit: PCBS has updated and simulated the Integrated Simulation Framework model in order to produce the PCBS economic forecast for 2012, which was released late in December 2011.

The two institutions will continue to cooperate by exchanging experiences, conducting workshops and carrying out study visits. Most significant in this context will be the provision by UNCTAD of training on macroeconometric modeling to staff of PCBS to enable them to conduct forecasting and policy analysis relevant to the Palestinian economy.

The cooperation and related training will build the capacity of PCBS staff to forecast the Palestinian economy under different scenarios and enable them to conduct quantitative assessments of the impact of alternative economic policies.

For its part, PCBS will provide UNCTAD with economic, labour and demographic statistics and indicators, periodic economic and statistical reports and forecasts useful to UNCTAD work on the Palestinian economy.

IV. ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

On 24 January 2012, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Excerpts of the briefing are reproduced below (S/PV.6706):

After 15 months of absence of direct talks, I am pleased to report that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators started meeting on 3 January in Amman under the auspices of King Abdullah and Minister for Foreign Affairs Judeh of Jordan and in the presence of Quartet envoys and Quartet representative Blair. Since that first meeting, a series of direct preparatory talks have been held under Jordanian auspices. The parties began discussing important issues related to territory and security, in accordance with the Quartet statement of 23 September 2011. They are also discussing ways to build confidence and create a positive environment for those talks to succeed.

The Secretary-General commended the Palestinian and Israeli leaders on those important first steps and expressed his appreciation to His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan for his initiative to facilitate talks and give new impetus to the Middle East peace process. The Secretary-General, who was in Lebanon 10 days ago, will soon visit the region again to support the search for peace.

We remain hopeful that the preparatory meetings between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators will continue and ultimately lead to serious negotiations based on comprehensive proposals on territory and security, and reaching an agreement for a two-State solution by the end of this year, as envisaged by the Quartet. In the short term, it is essential that provocations stop, as called for by the Quartet, and that early progress be made to build confidence among the parties and sustain these nascent talks.

Neither the international community nor the parties can afford to let this opportunity pass by. The Secretary-General continues to call on the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to show vision, courage and determination to reach a historical peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of the people on both sides.

Unfortunately, actions on the ground continue to contribute to tensions. Settlement activity in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, continued during the reporting period, and Under-Secretary-General Amos briefed this Council last week on the current situation. Violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians also remains troubling. On 25 December, an Israeli woman was injured by stones thrown at her car near Hebron. On 9 January, seven Palestinians were arrested by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) near Ramallah for throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at vehicles travelling on road 443 through the occupied territory. Settlers injured 12 Palestinians, including 4 children. Three Palestinian children were hit and injured by Israeli vehicles in Hebron and Nablus between 10 and 12 January. On 11 January, a mosque near the Palestinian town of Salfit was desecrated with Hebrew graffiti referencing "price tag" in connection with the dismantlement of an outpost. Settler attacks on Palestinian orchards also resulted in injuries and more than 100 Palestinian trees being uprooted.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished structures related to a number of unauthorized outposts. The demolition of outposts is an Israeli commitment under the Road Map. However, in parallel, new initiatives to retroactively legalize some outposts were advanced by the Government and in the Knesset. Israeli authorities also demolished 88 Palestinian structures in different locations of the West Bank during the reporting period, including 7 in East Jerusalem, citing lack of building permits. Demolitions included 21 residences and 25 water-related structures.

Citing security, the Israel Defense Forces conducted 336 operations in the occupied West Bank, during which 74 Palestinians, including 3 children, were injured and 273 arrested. Two IDF soldiers were also injured. The IDF arrested nine Palestinians allegedly in possession of illegal weapons and ammunition. On 4 January, the IDF shot and injured a Palestinian at a checkpoint near Bethlehem. On 22 January, a Palestinian man reportedly carrying a metal object was shot and injured by IDF soldiers at the Qalandia checkpoint.

In another concerning development, several members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) have been arrested by Israeli security forces. On 19 January, two Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, including Speaker Aziz Dweik, were arrested. On 23 January, Israeli security forces entered the compound of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Jerusalem and detained the two remaining Palestinian Legislative Council members who had sought refuge there since July 2010. Last night, another Hamas PLC member was arrested in his home in Ramallah. Two other PLC members were previously arrested at the ICRC building and transferred to Ramallah in 2011. The Palestinian negotiator subsequently delivered a letter to his Israeli counterpart complaining about the detention of the PLC Speaker, referencing Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody in general and calling for their release. We are troubled by reports that the Israeli authorities have subjected Mr. Dweik and possibly others to administrative detention.

Palestinian security forces continued to maintain law and order in the parts of the West Bank under the control of the Palestinian Authority. On 29 December, Palestinian security forces seized and defused an improvised explosive device, and on 6 January they arrested eight Palestinians on criminal charges in Hebron. On 14 January, Palestinian firefighters put out a blaze on an Israeli bus travelling south of Hebron and evacuated Israeli passengers. We also would like to remind the parties of their Road Map commitments to end incitement. In this regard, we have noted with concern the statement of the Palestinian Authority Mufti on 9 January.

The Palestinian Authority continues to build its institutions, which in April 2011 had already achieved a level sufficient for a functioning Government of a State. However, in a meeting with Special Coordinator Serry on 16 January, Prime Minister Fayyad expressed his grave concern about the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority. In 2011, direct budget support amounted to only $742 million out of the $1 billion that had been expected. Continued shortfalls could challenge the impressive progress realized through the State-building agenda. The United Nations encourages donors to deliver their contributions for 2012 as early as possible in the year.

The pace of economic growth slowed in the third quarter of 2011, increasing by only 0.5 per cent over the previous quarter. This,

however, was still a 12 per cent increase over the third quarter of 2010. During the third quarter of 2011, the West Bank actually saw its real economy shrink by 0.3 per cent, whereas the Gaza Strip experienced an economic expansion of 2.6 per cent in real terms. The structure of gross domestic product in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip reveals a continued concentration of economic activity in non-tradable sectors, including certain services, public administration and construction. Sustained growth will require an expansion of this productive base and the tradable goods sector. Increased measures to enable this and to reduce access impediments will be essential for continued growth, such as in manufacturing, mining and agriculture.

Weekly demonstrations continued in the West Bank against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 2004. Clashes with the Israel Defense Forces left 28 Palestinians injured; one Israeli soldier was injured by rock-throwing.

Turning now to the situation in Gaza, a total of 29 rockets and 12 mortar shells fired from Gaza hit Israel without resulting in injuries or damage. The Israel Defense Forces conducted six incursions and 10 airstrikes into Gala, resulting in four Palestinian militants being killed and seven injured, and 15 Palestinian civilians injured. We condemn in the strongest terms any indiscriminate firing towards civilian areas and call on Israel to show maximum restraint. Obligations under international humanitarian law must be respected for the protection of civilians. It is essential to strengthen the calm in order to improve the conditions of the population in Gaza.

We continue to call for the lifting of the closure in the framework of resolution 1860 (2009). In the short term, we believe that the full opening for the import of construction materials would bolster the legitimate Gazan economy and enable much needed reconstruction activities. It is important that exports be allowed to resume at scale, including transfers to the West Bank and Israel. These changes could be applied with due consideration for Israel's legitimate security concerns and could make a significant difference in the lives of many Gazans. We will continue to work with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority in this regard.

At present, the United Nations has received approvals for a total of approximately $270 million of works requiring construction materials that are still classified as dual use. However, three key housing projects of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, totalling over $60 million, have yet to be approved. Efforts between the factions to advance Palestinian reconciliation are continuing. Fatah and Hamas representatives met again in Cairo on 21 December to that end. On 14 January, the Palestinian Central Election Commission obtained permission to reopen its offices in Gaza.

We continue to support Palestinian unity within the framework of the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the positions of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative.

...

Turning back to the Middle East peace process, let me conclude by reiterating our determination to contribute to the ongoing talks, help the parties build mutual confidence, and develop concrete proposals on territory and security. Leadership is needed to ensure that the process moves

forward with the support of regional and international partners. As the Secretary-General recalled in Beirut, a two-State solution is long overdue. The status quo offers only the guarantee of future conflict. We must all do our part to secure a lasting peace that will end the occupation and the conflict and realize the legitimate rights of all.

The parties should now redouble their efforts to resolve all permanent status issues, end the conflict and establish an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

V. UNITED NATIONS HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR FOR THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY CALLS FOR AN END TO HOME DEMOLITIONS IN THE WEST BANK

The following press release was issued on 27 January 2012 by the Office of the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, Maxwell Gaylard:

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, Mr. Maxwell Gaylard, today called for an immediate end to the demolition of Palestinian homes by the authorities of the Government of Israel in the occupied West Bank.

During a visit on 26 January to Anata village on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Mr. Gaylard saw the ruins of seven Palestinian homes demolished earlier in the week and met with representatives of the displaced families. He was informed that bulldozers and troops had arrived in the middle of the night of 23 January and that 52 people, including 29 children, had been forced from their homes and the homes then completely destroyed.

For the year 2011, some 622 homes and livelihood structures belonging to Palestinian families were similarly destroyed, forcibly displacing almost 1,100 people, over half of them children, and compromising the livelihoods of several thousand more. Mr. Gaylard noted that these figures represent a dramatic increase compared with previous years, and that a much greater number, in the tens of thousands, remain under threat of dispossession, demolition and displacement.

Mr. Gaylard added: "Israel as the Occupying Power has a fundamental responsibility to protect the Palestinian civilian population under its control and to ensure their dignity and well-being. The wholesale destruction of their homes and livelihoods is not consistent with that responsibility and humanitarian ideals. The current policy and practice of demolitions cause extensive human suffering and should end. Palestinians urgently require ready access to a fair and non-discriminatory planning and zoning system that meets their needs for growth and development".

Mr. Gaylard also commended the work undertaken by human rights and humanitarian organizations to support Palestinian families in distress and expressed serious concern about the repeated destruction of facilities supported by them.